





**Rep. Jim Clements** 

# 14th District

2004 Mid-Session Report and Survey

February 2004

Dear friends,

Last year we worked with lawmakers from throughout Washington to pass legislation targeted at reviving our state's economy, putting people back to work, and controlling state government spending. Last month we went back to Olympia for the 2004 legislative session, anticipating picking up where we left off from the 2003 session.

By the end of the 60-day session in mid-March, we expect to have considered new legislation concerning not only Washington's economy, but also education, health care and public safety as well as Yakima-area issues. Please take a few minutes to read this brief report on the ongoing session. As always, we welcome your thoughts on the issues before us.

We're your representatives all the time, not only the two or three months we spend in Olympia annually. Our job is to serve and represent you, please contact us if we can assist you. Call the tollfree legislative hotline, send e-mails, write letters, or drop in for a visit if you are in the Olympia area. Your government works best when you're involved!

Mary Skinner

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# Getting our economy moving again for job creation

Last year, tax incentives adopted by the Legislature were a major reason why Boeing decided to build the 7E7 in our state, which will result in more jobs.

Now people are asking what the Legislature plans to do for small businesses that don't have the clout of Boeing? This is a very good question.

Washington's economy is largely supported by small business, including agriculture. Small business accounts for the majority of our local employment. That's why we are working to support small business so they can grow and create new jobs.

As ranking Republican of the House Trade and Economic Development Committee, Mary participated in small business forums across the state last summer and also collaborated with the Greater Yakima Chamber of Commerce and New Vision in areas of licensing and regulatory reform. Small businesses could create more jobs if they weren't so burdened with the expense of complying with excessive government regulations.

To foster economic recovery, we're looking at several options, including: increasing small business tax credits, providing a freeze in the state's minimum wage (which is the highest in the nation), reforming workers' compensation to bring the costs down, and extending existing tax credits that companies are using to provide jobs.



#### Be smart about spending

State government's financial picture is much better now than at this time last year. Some legislators wanted to increase taxes in 2003; instead, the Legislature ended up making realistic decisions that prevented a huge budget deficit.

This year we will adopt a supplement to cover spending changes that couldn't have been anticipated when the budget was adopted last year — such as increased K-12 school enrollments or the cost of fighting last summer's wildfires. However, we should not spend any more than absolutely necessary. This is not the time to commit to new programs. Instead, let's be smart and pay attention to building the state's reserves, to protect taxpayers in the future.

#### Knowing who's on our roads

Understandably, security is on our minds more than it was a few years ago. That's why it was a surprise to learn that Washington will issue driver's licenses, which many people regularly use for proof of identity, to people who can prove their driving skills but *cannot* prove their identity. Although those licenses are labeled "not valid for identification purposes," something about this just didn't make sense, so Jim checked on it.

It turns out the "not valid for ID" driver's licenses are allowed under a law adopted in 1969. The same law made photos on Washington driver's licenses a requirement instead of an option, and made personal ID cards available to non-drivers.

The legislation which created that law explained the purpose of requiring photos on driver's licenses and issuing picture ID cards — to "provide for the positive identification of persons." But Jim hasn't found an explanation for why, 34 years ago, the legislation also authorized the state to issue photo driver's licenses to people who *could not* prove their identity. That seems contrary to the main purpose of the law.

Jim has introduced legislation to correct the law and end this practice. Law enforcement officers should be able to rely on a driver's license to positively identify the holder. And if the purpose of requiring photos on driver's licenses is to establish identity, as the 1969 Legislature said, then let's make sure they can establish identity.

#### Let's be fair about liability

Our tort system gives citizens an opportunity to recover damages from those liable. When we talk of the need for tort reform, many people think in terms of the medical industry, and understandably so. Yakima has been fortunate in having two major hospitals and some of the state's top medical community. However, the high cost of medical malpractice insurance threatens to rob our community of these assets.

Medical insurance costs are going up too, to protect against lawsuits. The combination is causing health care to fly out of the reach of citizens.

We're concerned that "justice" is being lost from our civil justice system. We can and should do better, by adopting a fair, predictable and timely process for addressing liability. We plan to work this session to support almost a dozen reforms that will benefit service providers, consumers and citizens in general. Some of these reforms are particularly important because they could make medical malpractice insurance affordable again — and that would help preserve access to health care. Too many physicians have left our communities already.



Jim serves on the powerful Appropriations Committee and is a member of the House Republican leadership team.

### 14th District Mid-Session Report and Survey

## Discussion to ban studded tires resurfaces

In October, the Washington Transportation Commission unanimously recommended that the Legislature ban studded tires beginning in July. They cited roadway damage caused by studded tires at \$10 million a year.

We're concerned about the damage caused, but also about the fact that the ban would take away choices of the drivers in our state — especially those here in Eastern Washington who rely on studded tires in the winter. The Department of Transportation says about 32 percent of passenger vehicles in Eastern Washington use studded tires, while only 10 percent use them on the west side of the state.

Although it costs \$10 million to repair studded tirerelated road damage, our local taxpayers pay out more in gas tax to the state than we get back — 78 cents on the dollar. Our local tax money also supports ferries, which are primarily used on the west side of the state.

The Senate has a bill pending that wouldn't ban them, but instead would impose a \$15 fee on the sale of each new studded tire. We're also told that there may be new technologies available in the tire market that would provide the traction needed on ice and snow without the damage studs cause. We'd like to know what you think about this issue. Please make sure you answer the question in our survey and return it to us.

#### Progress on Pine Hollow reservoir

After a few years of quiet shepherding by Jim, progress is being made toward the first off-stream reservoir in the Yakima River Basin: the Pine Hollow project. The initial watershed assessment was just completed. It indicates the proposed reservoir (capacity: 25,000 acre-feet) would be able to capture enough excess water in the Ahtanum River during spring runoff to help farmers, fish and everyone else get through the summers. Jim is working closely with the state Department of Ecology and Gov. Locke in preparation for the next step: an environmental impact statement.

Jim is working toward a pre-construction analysis to help identify potential sources of construction money. The analysis can be conducted at the same time as the environmental impact statement.



Mary and Rep. Shirley Hankins, R-Richland, host Claire Thompson on Children's Day in the House of Representatives

#### Crack down on criminals

 Washington is fourth in the nation in auto thefts.
 Only Arizona, the District of Columbia and Nevada have more cars stolen.

Amazingly, juveniles commit over half of the auto thefts but don't receive a day in detention until their fifth conviction. Adults who steal cars and can't be proven to be part of an organized "chop shop" don't go to prison until their <u>seventh</u> conviction.

House Republicans sponsored three bills last year to crack down on auto theft, but none received more than committee approval. We need to do better if we're going to restore the public's trust.

- While auto thieves roam our streets and neighborhoods, graffiti writers victimize building owners, public works and community facilities with their senseless vandalism. Jim has introduced a measure to give law enforcement a stronger hand in dealing with graffiti.
- Sex offenders are supposed to register with the sheriff when they move into or around our counties. But many are avoiding the requirement. The typical punishment, which is 30 days in jail for a first offense, 60 days for a second offense, and 6 months for a third offense, isn't deterring sex offenders from violating their registration requirements. We need to make it clear to sex offenders that if they don't let us know where they are in the community, we will make sure we know where they are in prison.

## 2004 Legislative Questionnaire

Government works best when people actively participate. We feel a frequent survey of the 14<sup>th</sup> District is important in allowing us to better represent your views when we are voting on important legislation. If you would rather complete this survey online, please go to Rep. Skinner's web page at: http://hrc.leg.wa.gov/members/skinner.htm and click on the 14th District Survey link.

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issues which are of greatest importance to you.	whethe
economy and jobs	<b>*</b>
transportation	•
no new taxes	•
environment	<b>+</b>
crime	
affordable health care	<b>+</b>
education	<b>.</b>
liability reform	<b>.</b>
social services	
water storage	Publ
Other (please specify)	1 The
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	the Lee

#### Taxes and spending

Washington's Constitution requires a 60 percent yes vote – also known as a "supermajority" – to pass public school district levies and bond issues. Educators want to lower the threshold for approval to a "simple majority," which is 50 percent + one vote. They believe it would make education funding more stable. Because it would mean amending the Constitution, this proposed change would have to go to a vote of the people if the Legislature approves it. What would you prefer?

Keep the supermajority requirement f	for	bond
issues and levies		

- ☐ Change the Constitution to allow the simple majority for bonds and levies.
- ☐ Keep the supermajority for bonds; allow the simple majority for levies.

3 Lawmakers are looking at several options to help economic recovery and job creation. Please tell us whether you agree or disagree with these options.

<b>\</b>	Increase	small	busine	SS	tax	credits	
				•			

- □ agree □ disagree
- Freeze the state's minimum wage
  - □ agree □ disagree
- ♦ Reform workers' compensation
  - □ agree □ disagree
- Extend existing business tax credits
  - □ agree □ disagree
- **♦** Reduce regulatory red tape
  - □ agree □ disagree

#### **Public safety**

The Department of Ecology reported 1,694 methamphetamine labs in Washington in 2002. In many of those labs, children were found. How should the Legislature handle this growing problem?

- ☐ Make the manufacturing of meth a "strike" under the state's "Three Strikes" law.
- ☐ Increase penalties, but do not make meth manufacturing a strike.
- ☐ Current laws are working fine. No action is necessary.





## 14th District Mid-Session Report and Survey

#### **2004 Legislative Questionnaire** (continued)

When you are finished with this survey, please cut it, fold and mail it to us with the mail panel below showing. Thank you!

#### **Transportation**

The Transportation Commission says studded tires cause \$10 million damage to our state's highways each year. It wants the Legislature to ban studded tires.

Do you use studded tires? □ yes □ no

Please mark one of the following:

- ☐ The Legislature should ban studded tires.
- ☐ The Legislature should not ban studded tires, but instead pass legislation to impose a new fee on the sale of studded tires.
- ☐ The Legislature should not ban studded tires and should use existing revenues to pay for road damage.



6 Should Washington driver's licenses be issued to people who cannot prove their identity?

□ yes □ no

# Contact us! We are here to help you as well as represent you!

If you are having trouble dealing with a state agency, have a question about legislation, or have ideas, comments or concerns, please contact us.

Rep. Mary Skinner Rep. Jim Clements

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#### Visit our websites:

Rep. Skinner -

http://hrc.leg.wa.gov/members/skinner.htm

Rep. Clements -

http://hrc.leg.wa.gov/members/clements.htm

Please place stamp here



## 2004 Legislative Agenda -

#### Creating jobs and restoring public trust

Our 2004 legislative agenda will help Washington get back on track in four key areas:



#### FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY -

We must ensure that the state ends this biennium with an operating budget that is sustainable and does not require tax increases or a reduction in core state services. The Legislature must also strengthen the state's spending limit and create a reliable, constitutional "rainy day" fund.



#### **COMPETITIVENESS** -

The Legislature should work on creating a business climate that fosters a growing economy. With signs that the U.S. economy is rebounding, it is imperative that we position our state to participate in the economic expansion.



#### **✓** AFFORDABLE, ACCESSIBLE **HEALTH CARE -**

While the vast majority of people have health care coverage, the skyrocketing cost of that coverage is creating a crisis. The solution is by enacting insurance reforms that will help control costs, thereby enabling employers to provide coverage for their employees. Liability reforms are also needed that will reduce the cost of malpractice insurance, which is driving doctors out of our state.



#### ✓ EDUCATION –

We must provide our students with a world-class education. To accomplish this, we need to improve the **Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL)** and recruit, retain and reward quality teachers.

#### About this letter...

By law, we can send only two of these letters to you this year, because it's an election year. The second will arrive shortly after the legislative session ends. Thankfully, the law doesn't restrict us from responding directly to your questions. Use e-mail, call us on the toll-free hotline, or put a letter in the mail to us. We're always happy to hear from you.

> Report and Survey 2004 Mid-Session District

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